CALENDAR

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The ancient Yakut divided the year into lunar months (*yi-syl*). According to Jonov, one year (*tögürüksyl*) in our calendar was regarded as two years: spring and summer were counted as one year and fall and winter as another. Consequently, the time count in old Yakut traditions is much confused. For example, after two years in our count had passed, the Yakut may have said that four years had elapsed. The month was divided into two sections. The first half, until full moon, was called "the new" (*sañata*); the second half, following the full moon, "the old" (*ärgätä*). The days in the first half of the month are enumerated regularly from one to fifteen; in the second half, they are counted in reverse order, from fifteen to one. Thus, there are two fifteenth days in the month, one at the end of the first half and another at the beginning of the second half. Some moments in the phases of the moon are poetically defined; for instance, of the first day of the first half of the month, the Yakut say: *kys jaxtar kylamanbin kurduk kylbayan taxsŷta*, it glistened like the eyelash of a young girl; of the twenty-eighth day (the Yakut second day of the second half of the month) they say: *xotun jaxtar ylarhatyn iämähin saha ärgičiyä baranyta*, it ends like the size of a woman's earring.

The month, the Yakut say, has exactly thirty days. When asked how many months there are in a year, they usually answer: twelve. But this is difficult to compromise with their actual method of reckoning, since, were this so the *ot-yya* (hay month) would, during certain years, fall in winter. This is impossible. There are some corrections. It appears that the Yakut have more than twelve month names. They use the names for the twelve months in the following order:—

1. *Balyk ŷr*, Fish is spawning
2. *Bäs yya*, Month of pine, when its bark easily detaches itself
3. *Ot yya*, Month of hay
4. *Tördünyü*, The fourth
5. *Bäsinyi*, The fifth
6. *Alynyy*, The sixth
7. *Sätinyi*, The seventh
8. *Axsynyy*, The eighth
9. *Toxsuyny*, The ninth
10. *Olunyu*, The tenth
11. *Kulun tutar*, The foal he catches
12. *Müs ustar*, The ice drifts

The New Year according to our calendar falls about the end of the Yakut eighth month (*axsynyy*); thus, the Yakut *kulun tutar* almost coincides with March. When this was pointed out to them the Yakut

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

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themselves wondered, "How it was that in former times the foals were tied and the mares milked so early." At present mares foal in the twelfth month (*mūs ustar*) and even in the first month (*balyk ÿr*), approximately in April or May. The Yakut begin to milk their mares in the first month (*balyk ÿr*). But to clear up these moot points, it should be noted that the names for two more months are known: *atyjax yya* (the month of pitchfork, i.e., of drying hay) and *balahañña kīrār yi* (the month of changing the summer dwelling for the winter house). The Yakut usually say that the first of these two months is the same as *tōrdūnyū* (the fourth), but they are confused concerning the second month. Mr. V. M. Jonov is of the opinion that both names were inserted between the months *ot yya* and *bācinyi*, instead of *tōrdūnyū*, when the month names failed to match the corresponding season. Thus we have a thirteen month year. Jonov found that the Yakut agreed with him in this explanation.[1]

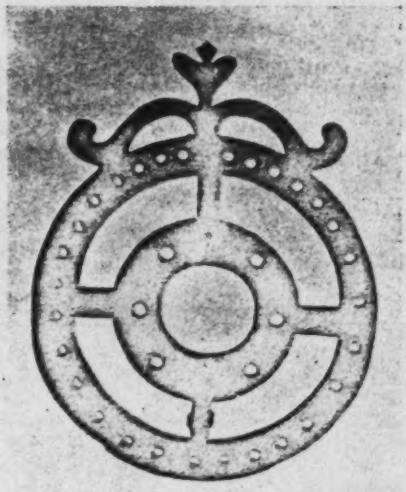

Fig. 1 (70–8818). A Calendar, the Inner Perforations represent the Days of the Week, the Outer Perforations, the Days of the Month.

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After becoming Christians the Yakut no longer followed this method of reckoning time, but oriented themselves by the Christian holidays, for instance: *kirisiāniye* (Russian, *krestcheniye*), baptism, January sixth; *Kiristiāp* (Russian, *Kristov*), Easter: *Orosuospa* (Russian *Rozhdestvo*), Christmas; *bulāstar* (Russian, *Vlasii*), or *ynax tañarata* (cow's holiday), February eleventh. Russians regard Saint Vlasii as the protector of domestic cattle and among the Yakut this saint replaced the female deity, Ayisit, of their old mythology. Among the Yakut are experienced individuals who know the number of days between holidays since it is easier to deal with immovable feasts. For movable festivals, they must often consult their priest. On the wall of every Yakut dwelling is a calendar, usually consisting of a small board with holes corresponding to the number of days in the year.

[1]Jonov, V. M., L'Aigle dans les Croyance Yakoutes (*Publications du Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Pétersbourg*, vol. 1, pt. 2, no. XVI, pp. 1–28, St.-Pétersbourg, 1913 [In Russian]), 22–23.

6: Sauer--115-116 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 771, 776, 821, 825

"The Socha regard themselves as in a perfect state of demonocracy. In general conversation, they call God, Tanghra; a church, Tanghra Dshi, God's house; and Sundays, Tanghra Kuin, God's day. I could not obtain any explanation of the attributes of Tanghra. Those of other gods they explain as follows:

Aar Toyon (the merciful chief) : To him they attribute the creation, and suppose him to have a wife, whom they call Kubey Chatoon (shining in glory): they are both all-mighty. --Another god, named Wechsyt (the advocate), carries up their prayers, and executes the resolutions of the godhead: Wechsyt, they say, used frequently to appear among them, and still continues now and then to shew himself, assuming the form of a white stallion, or different birds, from the eagle to the cuckoo. --Shessugai Toyon (the protector): he intercedes for them, and procures all desirable things, as children, cattle, riches, as well as all good and com-[116]fortable things: his wife they call Aksyt (the giver). --These are their benevolent gods; and I may add to the number a being which they adore in the sun: to these they offer sacrifices only once a year."

6: Sauer--121-122 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut-1-2
116, 805, 821

"The year they call gil, and divide it into four seasons, saas, (spring), soyin (summer), kuisan (autumn), and kisun (winter). A month they call ooi; of these they have 12 in the year, of 30 days, adding a supplemental moon for the deficiency every sixth year. Their months are named as follow: [122]

Besia	Budding month	May
Otti	Hay ditto	June
Ottershachia	Hay forks stacking	July
Tierdinnai	Fourth	August
Bessinnai	Fifth	September
Altidnai	Sixth	October
Settinnai	Seventh	November
Oksinnai	Eighth	December
Tochsinnai	Ninth	January
Ollunnai	Tenth	February
Koluntutor	Stallion	March
Bussustur	Thawing	April

They have no specific name for the supplemental month every sixth year.

They know the time of night by the situation of the great bear and the polar star: the former they call araghas solus.

Of the appoaching seasons they judge by the following phenomenon. If the pleiades, which they call oorgel, appear before the moon when seven days old in the month of January, they expect spring to commence in the beginning of April; if when nine days old, at the end of April; but if this happens on the tenth day, they expect a late spring, and begin to be very saving of their fodder."

7: Shklovsky -- 192-193 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut
116, 821

"The eclipse of the moon was beginning, but the spectacle did not alarm anyone, only the women and girls said pityingly: 'Poor thing! '

The Yakuts have an interesting legend to explain the eclipse:

The Oulooss gave a poor orphan girl to a rich man to work for him. He was very cruel and overworked her. One night he sent her with a pail to draw water from an ice-hole. The girl slipped, broke the pail, and spilt the water. She stood and wept. "No one to pity me, ' she cried. The sun pitied her and came [193] down, and the moon also. 'The girl is mine, I will take her, ' said the sun, 'for I am the elder. '

"The girl is mine, ' said the moon, 'you work in the daytime and it is cheerful for you. I am lonely at night. ' So the moon took her away to the 'high place. ' The girl was terrified and grasped at a willow twig, which broke away, and she took it with her. She is still to be seen in the moon, holding the pail and twig, but sometimes she longs so for the earth that she faints, and then the moon darkens with grief until the girl revives."

14: Krauss--166 [3] E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 554, 756, 771, 821

In view of the permanent uncertainty of his supplies, the Yakut is necessarily always occupied with the question whether the impending hunt or draught will be sufficient to provide food for himself and his family. The shaman will offer his services to answer this question. How could those little-civilized people who have a strong tendency towards miracle religion, renounce it to take their own profit from it? Especially, when frightful and inconceivable phenomena such as snow storms or the north-light confuse them and keep them in constant fear.

Permanent remoteness from other people makes the Yakut reflective. He is always alone with his ideas; so it is only natural that his mental activity is great, his imagination vivid. He longs for the mysterious, for mysticism. This is where the shamans find their field of activity.

Thus, the shaman is approached on the ground of his quality as a physician, fortune-teller, and mediator of secret knowledge; not at all, however, because he is a sacrificial priest or a theologian. The shaman himself endeavors to meet these needs, which make his presence among the population indispensable; and that is why he loses his former character as a priest.

17: Erman--302-303 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut-1-2
116, 533, 153, 821

"The teachers in the schools in Yakutsk, informed me that in their Yakutian scholars was to be remarked a singular aptitude for mechanical arts; but that, on the other hand, it was vain to think of teaching them arithmetic, or any such logical acquirements. Other Russians, who were as well acquainted with the language of the Yakuts as with their own, told me that the songs of those people often contain very remarkable passage of a character which we should call romantic. Thus, they assume that 'the trees of the forest hold discourse with one another; and other inanimate things with men.' These poetic fantasies pass away, for the most part, just as they arise, for whether on a journey, or in cheerful humour at home, every one sings the new impressions made on him at the moment, by the objects around him. They have for that purpose a kind of song consisting of only two notes; these are repeated frequently in such a way that the higher note follows the lower till towards the end of each part or verse, when their order is reversed. The whole air sounds so melancholy, that I often thought that I heard some one in the town wailing aloud, when, in fact, it was only the extemporaneous song of the Yakuts. It is not unlikely that my occupations have lived for the moment in Yakutian verses. The men inhabiting the yurts near our residence, used to come every night to the yard, to observe the use made of the transit instrument, and they[303] soon made up their minds as to its purpose. They were of opinion that I was reckoning the stars, and wrote down each of them in the account; that, in fact, a star had been lost in St. Petersburg, and I had been sent to try whether it could be found again

in any part of the earth. This story spread through the town, in the first instance, so generally, that even Russians asked me whether it was well founded; it then made its way over the country, even as far as the Tunguzes."

27: Coxwell--280-281 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut-1-2
116, 539, 821

"WHY THERE ARE SPOTS ON THE MOON (1)

1. Ethnogr. Review of Moscow Univ., 1897, No. 3, p. 179.

[RCH: For the author's notes on this tale see category 539, p. 293.]

Once there lived an orphan girl who, after the death of her parents, had a small home. Remaining in her tent, she did no work and for a while lived on what she possessed. Next the prince of the nomad village, her distant relative living near by, took her into his home; not from pity, but from greed; there was plenty of work to be done in his house, and he hoped to obtain assistance without payment. The orphan worked without resting day or night, but instead of gratitude from the prince's wicked wife received only blows on the back of her neck.

On a certain moonlight night, when the frost turned people's breaths into ice, the orphan went for water to the neighbouring lake. Reaching an icehole, she broke through the ice with a pick, filled her bucket with water and started homewards. But not far from some huts she stumbled against a willow and fell and upset her bucket, so that all the water was spilt. The orphan stood and pondered what she should do. The cold began to freeze her whole body, but she could not go back, because the icehole was already closed with fresh ice, and to obtain more water she would have to hew another hole, a task beyond her strength. If she returned without water, she would be beaten by

the prince's wife. She stood and wept. Floating along the sky, the silvery Moon looked at the orphan girl, and was pleased with her beauty.

The orphan began to implore the Moon: 'Deliver me,' she said, 'white Moon, from the torments which I endure in my life upon earth. Here it is so cold and the prince's wife beats [281] me cruelly every day, and people are wicked; none of them will say a kind word to me.'

The Moon heard the girl's entreaty, fell at her feet and, seizing her by the waist, was about to take her to his home; but suddenly, at that very moment, the Sun also fell at her feet and wished to take her. A contest began between the Moon and the Sun, and the latter seemed the stronger, because he is considered an elder brother and the Moon is his younger brother. The Moon, overcome by the Sun, spoke thus: 'This orphan entreated not you but me; at night I, and not you, rule the universe, but you will reign to-morrow and can then consume the girl with heat; it is night now, and she belongs to me.'

The sensible Sun understood that the Moon's contention was just, and yielded up the orphan. The Moon took the girl home, together with the willow which she had grasped in her terror during the contest. The girl kept her buckets and the yoke on her shoulders, and she thus appears every night when it is bright. But when the orphan casts glances at the earth and sees the continuance of evil and injustice her face becomes gloomy. This story explains why there are dark spots on the Moon."

27: Coxwell--293 B-3 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 539, 821

[RCH: The following is the author's own comment on the folk-tale "Why There Are Spots on the Moon" in category 539, pp. 280-281.]

"As in many Siberian and Sub-Arctic tales, the Sun and Moon are treated as familiar objects or persons. In Yakut and Chukchi tales both the Sun and Moon are male. This story is fuller and more poetical than the other versions [RCH: e.g., Buryat and Tungusian], and is the only one which makes mention of a willow. We get here a graphic picture of life in an intensely cold climate."

43: Karutz--74 [8] E-2 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 771, 821

Intellectual life formerly went entirely on shamanistic lines. Spiritual entities were seen behind the phenomena (particularly by the shamans), behind sun and moon, lightning and thunder, stones and plants, and reached with hymnic, mantram-like songs, in solemn rythmical dances, and in sacrifices. Ancient, esoteric mysticism is still suggested by the use of drums, on the ring of which there are twelve salients, apparently symbolizing the zodiac. Nowadays mental activity is artificially kept awake with the help of coarsely carved figures.

46: Cottrell--139-140 T-2 (1840) 1842 Yakut
116, 177, 789, 821 Russia
636.82

"Another equally ridiculous notion, [RCH: as that about the flesh of the white partridge; see category 116, p. 139] and which they show their faith in by constantly acting up to it in [140] summer, is, that there are certain stones, which have the faculty of troubling the air, or producing a sudden change in the temperature. This is an ancient superstition, and probably was so generally adopted, that more than a hundred years ago, in the reign of the Empress Anne, an ukase was issued, prohibiting, under severe penalties, the use of these stones."

46: Cottrell--140-141 T-2 (1840) 1842 Yakut -1-2
116, 171, 789, 821

"All classes at Yakutsk, both high and low, are firmly persuaded that they have the power of producing at will rain or cool wind, for neither more nor less than nine successive days, when the proper forms are gone through to procure it. The stone must be well authenticated as having been found in the stomach of an animal; the more savage the beast, the more efficacious is the stone, so that one found in a bear is the most highly prized; then that in a wolf, &c., &c.; a horse, or any domestic animal, considerably less so. It is called the ssatà, and the manner of using it is simple enough, and has no pretension to sorcery, or any of the black arts, like their professors, who pretend to divine the future destinies of their dupes. To procure rain, the person must rise before the sun, and the instant he catches a glimpse of it above the horizon, dip the stone in spring water, and holding it between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, present it to the orb of day. At the same time he must make three pirouettes in the direction opposite to that of the course of this luminary, and the charm is completed. In order to obtain a cool wind for nine days, the ssatà must be dipped in the blood of a bird or beast recently killed, and presented to the sun with the same turnings as before. All those who travel in this country in the [141] summer, are tormented by the heat and insects, which are almost intolerable. As soon as they leave a town, they send a Yakut, with the commission to find some one who possesses this treasure, and when he is found, for a few ounces of tobacco the process is gone through the following

morning, and the traveller has nothing more to fear for nine days from the heat or musquitoes. We possess one of these charmed pebbles, which was given to Mr. de Hedenström by a golová of Verkhoyansk, and was found in the paunch of a wolf. It is a round piece of quartz, not transparent, about the size of a marble, which possibly had been washed in some mountain stream for centuries, till it became perfectly smooth and round, and was swallowed by a wolf who came to drink. Its virtues, however, have never been tested since it went out of the golová's possession; but Mr. de Hedenström is convinced of the man's sincerity, when he assured him it was found in a wolf. That this superstition is of very ancient date, and is derived from the Huns, we have the authority of Gibbon, who says that Attila was dreaded, not only as a warrior, but as a magician, and that he, by this means, vanquished the Khan of the Gèougen. The fears of the Gèougen had reference to some such apparent act of sorcery as this, for they believed that the Huns could excite at pleasure storms of wind and rain. This phenomenon is stated in the history of Timur Beg to have been produced by a stone called gezî, to whose magic power the loss of a battle was also ascribed by the Mahometan Tatars of the fourteenth century."

/172 cont./

I brought out my magnetic bars and angled with them, as well as with my pocketknife magnetized on them, for needles scattered on the table, to the great delight of those present, which was made known with an abundance of extraordinary interjections, in which these primitive peoples /173/ are able to accomplish a great deal. The fact that they could not do the same thing with their own knives, made of soft iron, no matter how much I touched them with my amazing bars, seemed particularly miraculous to them. Czekanowsky decided that if he ever traveled through these regions again he would provide himself with various magnetic playthings for barter.

The compass caused almost even greater astonishment when they discovered that with this instrument one could find one's way in the tundra even during a snow storm. Their knowledge of astronomy does not seem to be very great; as far as was to be understood through the interpreter, the elder knew only the Great Bear, about which he maintained that "it moves its tail," but, with clear skies, experienced tundra guides are said to be able to orient themselves by the stars.

The statements of the elder completely confirmed all the praise that Chitrow bestowed on the inhabitants of these regions. Their love of their fellow men is positively unheard of and reminds one of patriarchal times and conditions. Not only do the rich never abandon their poorer fellow tribesmen in case of need, they feed and clothe them, and if, as often happens, the reindeer fall prey to wolves, they replace the loss for the ones robbed -- Chitrow says that a Tungus of his acquaintance was supported in this way for three successive years and that such support may amount to 30 reindeer, a sizable fortune here -- there even prevails a custom whereby the hunting booty, especially slain reindeer, is shared among all the companions or family members; the pelt is given to each member in turn -- with the exception of the fortunate hunter, who fears losing his talent for hunting if he violates this custom held sacred by the fathers. The two /174/ Tungus accompanying us made peculiar faces at